

THE MIDLAND

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POEMS

By MARIE EMILIE GILCHRIST

PART OF AUTUMN

Part of autumn it is, perhaps
To find a beauty in being slow;
Fears for the unripe grain are past,
All our harvest is safe from the snow.
And before snow flies there's another harvest —
Apple-green wisdom slowly mellowing,
Smooth hard nuts for cracking and munching,
Leaves to shed that are sapped and yellowing.
These take a golden space of time
To gather and handle, time unreckoned,
Quaint old time with the latch-string out —
Not the modern locks of minute and second;
Time to wonder, and measure the space
From the fruit in your hand to the far horizon,
Time to think until you forget
The pumpkin-heap you had your eyes on;
Time so wide it takes life in
Across its worn old wooden sill —
A shining load of human straws.
In time's great barn, hay-strewn and still
Fronting the stubble fields, I pause,
Turning my thoughts in the afternoon sun
To catch a tinge of ripeness so.

Part of autumn it is, perhaps
To find a beauty in being slow.

TILLIE

Her name was Tillie, and she sang
Old songs brought out of Hungary.
Stepping around our big farm-kitchen
At her work, she sang to me
Magyar words to strange wild tunes,
Queer-cadenced, infinitely sad;
And told me what they meant with all
The wit and English that she had.

“There are candles on the altar:
Before it we stand, my lover and me
And I think of my lost girl-life,
And I am sorry all my days.”

.
“Oh, how sweet the church bells ring!
Oh, I think they are for my lover.
Oh, if they will only wait
Until I come, I will lean over
My lover's coffin, and cry . . . and cry. . .”

From childhood up I have remembered
These words that Tillie told to me,
Easing her homesick heart with songs,
Old songs brought out of Hungary.

PORTRAIT SKETCH

You are like a secret valley
Musical and still.
You are like a grove of pines
Alone, on a hill.
Sweet as forest brooks, and strong
As pines against clear light;
Beautiful as distance
And a great height.

PRESERVED

Some few words that love made heavy
As white quartz pebbles children throw
Into the cool, dark depths of a spring
To lie forever there below:
Such small words have plumbed my heart
And lie there shining year on year —
Once was said to me *I know*
And another time *My dear*.

ONLY COLOR

If I could paint, I would make immortal
An old square house on a country road
At the rise of a hill, and the snow around it
Covering fields that were long unmowed.
There is your outline, bare and plain;
For pigment — clapboards mossed and old
Weathered to solid strokes of color
Rich and sinister and cold.
Black there was, like soot for softness;
Silver many a moon had sifted,
Mauve and blue of shadow and smoke.
Against the door the snow was drifted.
Windows were pale lozenges
Of winter sky on ebony laid,
And white snow lapped the peaked roof.
Behind the house tall black trees made
A screen against the coming night.
It was no more a thing of man's
Contriving. *Only color was left*
Of lifetimes spent, and young men's plans.

THERE MUST BE MUSIC

When she was young, there was a harmony
In life; it was a song her lover taught her.
And when fate's hand fell sharply on her heart
Tearing a chord across those fragile wires
Deeper than she could sing, she only heard
Discord and ruin in that strident music.
Earth echoed hideously, and she crept home
Behind the four dear walls where she was safe,
Where there were little harmonies, brief tunes
That fitted perfectly a smaller world.
What if such music weaves too small a circle
To hold a dream; what if it never pauses
To let old grief flower and fall to earth?
It will suffice, so long as she can hear
A little round of notes. She is afraid
Of life's tremendous minor symphony.

LOST SOUNDS

There is a silence in my heart
For sounds that pass unheard away,
The jargon of a country day.
I have a silence kept apart
For birds and amber brooks at height,
For little whispering tongues of leaves,
Spring rain on winter blackened eaves,
For frogs rejoicing day and night.
Beyond the pavements' throb and roar
There is a sound of droning bees
Preoccupied with appletrees. . . .
Like dream-surf on some visioned shore,
Like winds across a grassy hill,
Loved voices spend themselves, apart.
There is a silence in my heart
That only country sounds can fill.

AN EPITAPH

Constrained by love and poverty,
These shared life in a little space;
And loving — yet each sometimes loathed
The other's too-familiar face.
O Earth, that so much robs the soul,
Now make them one; now make them whole!

FILIAE

Daughterly love, like dower-linen
Spun and woven long ago,
Uncut lengths from her grandmother's loom
Creamed with age and rough with tow —
Folded away in her homely heart
It lay unworn and unbestowed.
It had no use while her father lived;
It could not even be his shroud.

THE OLD CLOCK

She has grown old;
She has taken an old clock for her companion
And finds some reassurance in the throb
Of steady minutes. Something in her blood
Whispers that clocks and hearts at length run down
To timelessness.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

I

SITUATION WANTED — *Young woman with one-year-old boy, wants housework in the country.*

And so he's married. Well — it's ended now.
There's nothing left to wait for after that;
I've finished trying to think just how he felt.
Men shut a door on what's behind, and then
Forget so well they even lose the key;
But women shut it soft, knowing there's that
Behind might cry and wake them in the dark.
They always keep the key some secret place
So they can go on back remembering
How much they loved or hated what's gone by.
And you! . . . The way you use your little hands,
Your sleepy eyes, your shoulders set so square. . . .
It seems as if I saw him 'stead of you. . . .
But after this they must mean you alone
And you'll mean everything.

This is no place
To raise a boy in. Somehow things don't count
Here in the city as they rightly should,
Else home and us might have meant more to him.
I'll find a place for us — not where I came from —
I'm different now, but I'm not changed the way
They'd think I would be, coming back with you.
They don't know what they've got there in the hills,
But I know, having missed it these two years;
That's something gained that I can teach to you.
You'll learn a lot too, running in the fields
And sharing men's work when you're still a boy.
I'll earn a living for us; I can churn
And bake and wash since I was twelve years old.
My work will have to count more than my name
To those that question. But I'll find my power

In country things I've learned the meaning of.
And I'll have you to face the hills with me.

II

Butter and Eggs for Sale.

We'll get along some way. Lee's young and strong
And all the smaller ones can help a lot,
And I can work as good's a man, he said.
He told me often what he meant to do
About the farm. Things will be mighty hard
For us . . . and living here without him
Is hardest . . . for us all. He lived here always;
Them maples there, grown higher than the house,
He planted them when he was little as Rob.
And night-times when we sit around the stove
It seems just like he must be in the barn
Or driving home late from the village store
Instead of lying out there . . . cold . . . and wet . . .
We scrimped and saved two years to build the silo,
And he was digging postholes for the fence
When . . .
It was nice of you to come and see us;
We don't need help. We'll get along somehow
And keep the farm. That meant the most to him.

III

FOR SALE—A 1 roadhouse with billiard and bowling parlors. Owner selling on account of health.

I'm done for! Sentenced by the Doc to loaf
And look in on a game with stakes too high
For me to take a hand in now I'm sick.
He says I've got to give the business up
Or croak, and *anybody wants to live!*
So all I've worked for since I was a kid
Is up for sale, to sell for half it's worth,

Though even that means Easy Street for me:
 The smartest roadhouse near the city limits,
 Fine bowling parlors and a pool-room too,
 Three alleys, seven tables, all first-class.
 And Hannah marries me this Saturday
 Because I've lost my grip and need a nurse!
 I never thought she'd get me. She was caught,
 Leaving her man and coming here to work —
 That named her; and she had her boy to raise.
 I guess her cooking's helped the place along;
 She has her points; she sure can turn off work,
 And she was sort of pretty when she came,
 Green-eyed and easy-stepping like a cat.
 Jim didn't treat her right . . . she had her reasons
 For leaving him; and I was kind of soft . . .
 Besides, I knew I had the upper hand:

She won't get all my coin; I'll see to that!

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

MARIE EMILIE GILCHRIST was born in Ohio and has lived most of her life there. She is a graduate of Smith College and took a master's degree there. She is now living in Cleveland.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE MIDLAND, REQUIRED BY LAW

Editors.....John T. Frederick and Frank Luther Mott, Iowa City, Iowa
 Owner and Publisher.....John T. Frederick, Iowa City, Iowa
 Subscribed and sworn to before me, September 25, 1925.

LESTER BOCK, Notary Public in Johnson County, Iowa.

